

THE EASTERN BUDDHIST

offered an enlightening contribution to the subject in hand. The reviewer may finally be permitted to express a wish and a hope. Due to the fact that K. L. Thai, dealing with Zen Buddhism, hails from Vietnam and that Vietnam has its own Zen culture and history which even antedates that of Japan by roughly speaking 600 years—for western students of Buddhism quite a surprise—one feels prompted to request and wish in earnest that she and other qualified Vietnamese scholars, authors and poets try their best and eventually succeed in making accessible to the scholarly world and the interested general public the grandeur of the indigenous Zen tradition of Vietnam; for what is known of it outside Vietnam is next to nothing.

BHIKKHU PASADIKA

THE NOTHINGNESS BEYOND GOD: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Nishida Kitarō. By Robert E. Carter. Paragon House, 1989. xxvii + 191 pp., with a bibliography and index. ISBN 1-55778-072-2

More than twenty years have passed since Nishida Kitarō's maiden work was translated into English by V. H. Viglielmo under the title *A Study of Good*. Since then, Western scholars in increasing numbers have been turning their attention to Nishida's philosophy, as well as to the thought of other thinkers of the so-called Kyoto School centered at Kyoto University. There have appeared recently in the West two books which try to come to grips with the studies in this field. One of them is *Absolutes Nichts*, published by Hans Waldenfels in 1976. The other is *The Nothingness beyond God* by R. E. Carter. I should like to offer some comments on the latter.

The Nothingness beyond God consists of six chapters, devoted to the topics of "pure experience," the logic of *bashō*," "self-contradictory identity," "God and Nothingness," "religion and morality," and "value, ethics, and feeling."

According to Professor Carter, Nishida, while firmly standing within Zen Buddhist tradition, endeavoured to give expression to his "passion for rendering Buddhist paradoxical utterance, or the Zen experience of immediacy understandable" by having recourse to or through the medium of the "several languages of Western philosophy" (xiii). Professor Carter rightly points out that, even though there is no doubt that Nishida's philosophy favors a Zen-oriented perspective, he is "a bridge between East and West precisely because he identifies himself with neither alleged perspective and sees more often than most that the work of philosophy is neither Eastern nor Western, but takes as

BOOK REVIEW

its material the overlapping insights of people anywhere in the world, and produces from that material a totality of thought transcending any particular cultural perspectives" (p. 144).

It is well-known that Nishida's philosophy can be characterized as "the *basho* of absolute nothingness." It can be said that this term constitutes one of the most important ideas through which to find a way to an understanding of his philosophy. Professor Carter seems to have tried to clarify the term entirely in line with the Zen Buddhist tradition which says that, in the midst of our daily life where we see things with our eyes, the eye does not see the eye. We can formulate this matter in such a way that the eye is an eye precisely because it is not an eye. For, in spite of the fact that the *raison d'être* of an eye consists in seeing, it is here said not to "see" the eye itself. With this perspective in mind, we must say that the *raison d'être* of an eye precisely consists in not seeing. According to Zen Buddhism, at the ground of these ways of thinking lies the "logic of *soku-hi*." Professor Carter follows D.T. Suzuki's formulation of this logic: "A is A; A is not-A; therefore A is A" (p. 59). By appealing to this logic, Zen Buddhism tries to give expression to "the absolute identification of the *is* and the *is not*" (p. 59). Moreover, Professor Carter holds the view that this absolute identification is nothing else than absolute nothingness. Just because absolute nothingness is that by virtue of which the eye is said not to see an eye in the midst of its seeing everything in daily life, it cannot be established in separation or apart from this world in which we are born, act, and die. Buddhism tries to describe this truth in terms of "*Nirvana* is at the same time *samsara*." As Professor Carter emphasizes, Nishida's philosophy is an attempt to formulate this characteristic Mahayana principle and to render it understandable by employing the languages of Western philosophy.

It is generally maintained that one of the essential features of Nishida's philosophy can be expressed by means of "the identity of absolute contradictories." Tanabe Hajime, though a successor to Nishida at Kyoto University, leveled strong criticisms against him, pointing out that, even though Nishida busies himself speaking of contradictories, his arguments terminate in a mystical intuition of the self-identical whole inclusive of these contradictories which is, in the final analysis, based on the self-identical logic of reason. If Tanabe's interpretation is tenable, there is no other alternative but to conclude that Nishida's philosophy deviates from the Buddhist thesis that *nirvana* is at the same time *samsara*, just because the alleged self-identical whole is, in this case, thought to arise independently of this world in which contradictories occur. In an attempt to interpret this key term of Nishida's philosophy Professor Carter is careful to avoid this pitfall himself. He rightly points out that "Nishida's strength is that he did not attempt to resolve the contradictions of

THE EASTERN BUDDHIST

experience, but saw them as inescapable as descriptions of the way the world is, as it is known by us. The result is not synthesis, but a unity-in-contradiction, and identity-of-opposites" (p. 70).

Professor Carter points out elsewhere in the book that in order to do justice to what Nishida wants to convey by means of "the self-identity of absolute contradictories," we must take into consideration "the dynamical tension" (p. 62) of these contradictories instead of their synthesis. He repeatedly refers to this tension in terms of "double aperture."

By virtue of the fact that absolute nothingness is established in the midst of our daily life as the dynamical tension of contradictories, it makes its appearance through all the things in this world as "forms of the formless." For this reason, Professor Carter insists that it is "neither transcendent nor immanent in the Western sense of these terms," (p. 86) and goes on to say that "at the least, nothingness is both transcendent and immanent, and at most neither, because it is beyond (or different from) these categories" (p. 86).

The reader may at first be somewhat puzzled by the title *The Nothingness beyond God*. Referring to the relation which nothingness bears to the world, Carter says that it is both transcendent and immanent. He describes it in terms of the "immanently transcendent" in contradistinction to the "transcendent transcendence" which characterizes "the Judeo-Christian (and typically Western) account of the man/God relationship" (p. 119). According to the Western tradition, God is usually taken "to be (out there) somehow, as a transcendent objective absolute, who is distinctly separate from us, even spatially" (p. 119). By contrast, on the grounds that absolute nothingness is both transcendent and immanent, it is regarded as that "out of which even God arises" (p. 85). This is the reason why Professor Carter regards the nothingness as beyond God. With regard to the view that nothingness is an undifferentiated whole inclusive of both being and non-being, he says that "Nothingness is the non-dualistic whole which is as it is, and before it is sliced up by the dualistic logic of being and non-being" (p. 83).

Finally I would like to offer a few words of criticisms regarding Professor Carter's interpretation of Nishida's philosophy. He seems to be inconsistent in arguing on the one hand that while nothingness can be characterized in terms of "the identity of absolute contradictories," the term "identity" should not be taken in this case as indicating synthesis, while stating on the other that nothingness is a whole inclusive of both being and non-being.

Professor Carter falls victim to another inconsistency, when, while saying that "nothingness is the world as contradictory identity" (p. 69) he states that self is also the *basho* of absolute nothingness. I am convinced that the reason for this lies in his attempt to interpret Nishida's philosophy too closely in line with Zen Buddhism. Nishida himself warns us to guard against this tempta-

BOOK REVIEW

tion when he said, "I carry on my arguments not from a standpoint of religious experience but on the basis of the thoroughgoing logical analysis about the historical reality. Furthermore, the purpose of my arguments consists not in merely analysing its [static] structure but in pursuing its [dynamic] movement" (Nishida Zenshū, Vol 9, p. 57).

Professor Carter is right in repeatedly pointing out that "the self is the *basho*" (p. 146) where nothingness, in which absolute contradictories are said to be self-identical, arises. But in order that the self may be the *basho* of this kind, it cannot be separated from the historical world wherein we are born, act, and die, and which must be "something like the contradictory self-identity of the many and the one" (p. 58. Zenshū, Vol 12, p. 290). As regards the relation between the historical world and the self, Nishida holds a view such as this: The historical world makes a constant advance from the created to the creating in a contradictory-self-identity-fashion of the many and the one, through the medium of the self, which is also said to be in contradictory self-identity in its self-creating activities, insofar as it is determined by its own historical world, and at the same time turns out to be a determining agent in its relation to this world. This mutual dialectical relation between the world and the self takes place "here and now," that is to say, at each moment in which the world thus makes a creative advancement. Nishida often argues that absolute nothingness realizes itself in this very moment.

Attention should be paid to the fact that the term "realize" has a double meaning: It means that something makes its appearance, and thus realizes itself; and also that a human being understands and thus gets a grip on this something. When Nishida speaks of the inverse correspondence between nothingness and the world or between nothingness and the self, he has in mind the "realization" of nothingness in the above-mentioned sense. I regret that Professor Carter does not refer to this crucial issue, which Nishida arrived at in the last stage of his philosophical development.

YAMAMOTO SEISAKU